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ABSTRACT

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Abstract

This study investigated relationships among mothers' social support, individual attributes, social capital, and parenting practices for welfare-participating mothers with young children. Using data from the National Evaluation of Welfare-to-Work Strategies, latent profile analysis revealed three classes of mothers, reflecting high, moderate, and low patterns of social support. Overall, low support class members were quite broadly disadvantaged relative to the other groups, while moderate support class members were primarily disadvantaged in terms of neighborhood. Relationships between social support and social capital were highly nuanced, with strong social support acting as a "buffer" against the effects of mothers' stress on controlling discipline, but moderately constrained social support protecting against the negative effects of a welfare-based peer group on maternal warmth.

Managing to Parent:
Social Support, Social Capital, and Parenting Practices among Welfare-Participating Mothers with Young Children

All parents manage a variety of resources—knowledge, experience, and skills, as well as material goods and neighborhood or community resources—in the day-to-day processes and practices of parenting. Affluent parents with access to desirable resources can manage parenting in ways that go well beyond meeting basic needs, resulting in value added to their children's potential. For poor parents with fewer material resources, managing to parent can be a struggle to ensure safety, to provide for basic needs, and to create spaces and opportunities in which their children are not constrained from realizing their potential. Scholarship focusing on social networks and parenting indicates that social relationships can aid parents in coping with the stresses and demands of child rearing, particularly in the context of family poverty (Belle, 1983; Benin and Keith, 1995; Ceballo and McLoyd, 2002; Garbarino, 1987; Hashima and Yamato, 1994; Webster-Stratton, 1997; Weinraub and Wolf, 1983; Zigler, 1994).

Along these lines, literatures on social support and social capital each present evidence that social ties are important for understanding family processes, the former emphasizing interpersonal aspects of relationship, and the latter highlighting the structural aspects of "social positions" which facilitate relationships between individuals who are similar in terms of wealth, income, education, and cultural characteristics (Lin, 2000; Bourdieu, 1986). Social capital theory emphasizes that the value of social networks is a product of social structures, thus making a critical connection between person-level dynamics and the broader societal arrangements which generate and sustain inequality, securing disadvantage on particular people and communities. There is a need, however, for more attention to the ways that individuals actually encounter, access, and are affected by these societal arrangements within their daily lives. A rich social support literature, which tends to neighborhood context as well as to interpersonal skills, suggests that the effect of social support on individual behaviors is shaped by where one lives, and the attitudes, norms, behaviors and resources of one's neighbors. This literature provides

critical insights on the contextuality of social support, but the focus remains on interpersonal relationships, with neighborhood-level factors often seen as a static (though perhaps problematic) background. We currently lack an explicit conceptual model linking social support to the systematic functioning of social structures, thus limiting both our understanding of how inequalities are sustained in daily life and our ability to work with low-income families in ways that balance adaptation to immediate needs and concerns with strategies for reducing inequality and generating new opportunities. The purpose of the research presented here is, therefore, to begin to develop such a model by exploring connections between social support, social capital, and parenting practices.

This study addresses the general research questions of (1) how mothers' perceived access to social support relates to their social position and (2) how the package of resources associated with different levels of social support relates to parenting practices. This study's population consists of mothers who are receiving welfare and who have young children—a group for whom parenting practices and the daily mediation of home and neighborhood factors may have a particularly large effect on child well-being and development. This study is interested in *describing individuals* who are managing to parent in poverty, rather than examining the function of different variables for explaining parenting in poverty. Therefore latent profile analysis, a person-centered analytic strategy, will be used to explore mothers' patterns of access to different types of social supports, allowing for the subsequent description of those patterns in the context of individual, family, and neighborhood characteristics, as well as parenting practices. The logic underlying the analytic approach is largely inductive, involving the identification of meaningful categories within the data, and the linking of those categories to other descriptors in order to suggest possible patterns in how women manage to parent in strained social and economic contexts. This project should be seen as an initial step within a broader research agenda which must, ultimately, include complementary qualitative data on women's experiences, perspectives, and meaning-making about their own lives.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Social Support and Network Functionality

A social support system has been described as "a set of personal contacts through which the individual maintains his social identity and receives emotional supports, material aid and services, information and new social contacts" (Walker et al., 1977, in Malson, 1983). Often separated into "emotional support" and "instrumental support" categories, social support is associated with the functional properties of a social network, which can buffer parents from stresses associated with poverty, both by providing access to scarce and necessary resources through mutual aid (Stack, 1974) and by generating opportunities for sharing frustrations, problem-solving, and otherwise helping people to cope with daily life. Empirically, social support has been shown to reduce the negative effect of poverty on parenting (Benin and Keith, 1995; McLoyd, 1990; Webster-Stratton, 1997; Zigler, 1994) and to ameliorate the risk of child maltreatment (Garbarino, 1987).

Other studies suggest that the effect of social support on parenting is moderated by neighborhood context and family poverty. Hashima and Amato (1994), for example, found that social support in the form of help with child care benefits all families, but that other forms of social support only enhance parenting among low-income families. Ceballo and McLoyd (2002) demonstrated that social support enhances parenting for families in desirable neighborhoods, but has no effect on parenting in poor and dangerous neighborhoods. Moreover, Ceballo and McLoyd demonstrated that emotional support and instrumental support, providing different types of resources, have different effects on parenting, and that those effects are differently influenced by neighborhood factors. These studies provide support for previous findings that parents' experiences of social support are important to understanding how they cope with parenting in poverty. At the same time, these studies raise key questions about the relationships between social support, types of social resources, and individual and neighborhood-level characteristics.

A social capital theoretical framework provides a lens through which these complex dynamics may be understood more holistically—as manifestations of the individual situated within a social position.

Invoking Social Capital as a Context for Social Support

Modern uses of the term "social capital" are generally traced back to Bourdieu's work in the 1970s, positing various forms of "capital" to explain how social stratifications are sustained through the reproduction of relationships between groups or classes. Bourdieu (1986) used the construct, "social capital," to signify the value embedded in durable and mutually obligating social ties, in an effort to explain how and why individuals, given many freedoms, choices, and opportunities to achieve, tend to stay positioned within the social classes of their parents, friends, and colleagues. Because individuals at more advantaged social positions tend to have friends and social contacts who are also advantageously positioned, they have access to resources, information, cultural norms, and nuances of behavior that mark and sustain class identity and privilege. Thus, while transfers of economic wealth from parents to children are the most visible form of the reproduction of elite groups, the transfer of access to highly positioned social ties—or social capital—is an additional mechanism through which social inequalities are perpetuated.

Fundamental to the concept of social capital is the notion that the value of an individual's social ties is related to the position of her/his social network in the overall social structure, making social capital implicitly socially situated. This situatedness is clarified and reflected in the common breakdown of social capital into two component parts: social support and social leverage (see Woolcock, 1998; Lang and Hornburg, 1998; Warren et al, 1999). Briggs (1998) describes social support as the lateral relationships that help one to "get by" within a social position, and social leverage as the vertical relationships that help one to "get ahead" to a different, more advantaged social position (see Lin, 2000, for a thorough explanation of the conceptual distinctions between social support and social leverage). Most people have at least some social support from "strong ties" (Granovetter, 1973) to friends and family who help them

with daily life (Stack, 1974), but people who are socioeconomically disadvantaged may lack the critical social leverage that could come from more distant "weak ties" to people with valued resources that would help them to access new information, resources, and opportunities (Wilson, 1996).

When this general understanding of social capital is applied to issues related to parent and child poverty, a key insight from a growing body of research on neighborhood poverty is that risks associated with income poverty can be compounded when poor families are embedded in resource-poor social networks (Kelly, 1994; Stanton-Salazar, 1997; Wilson, 1996). When a parent is not only poor herself, but also has friends, family, and neighbors who are poor, there are simply fewer resources and role models to draw on to cope with day-to-day challenges, to generate new information or strategies for improving life circumstances, or for responding optimally to children's emerging needs. Moreover, when neighborhoods have high concentrations of poor families, the impoverishment within social networks tends to ripple outward to a gradual deterioration of local institutions, such as schools, parks, community centers, and libraries, which, in more affluent communities, support families in their child-rearing tasks (Wilson, 1996; Klebanov, Brooks-Gunn, and Duncan, 1994).

A social capital perspective, thus, provides what Furstenburg and Hughes (1995) describe as a "conceptual link between the attributes of individual actors and their immediate social contexts." To make this conceptual link practically useful for improving social services and policies targeting low-income parents, however, will require a better understanding of when and how parents develop and use social capital—not as separate from other resources or circumstances, but as an interrelated part of the whole package of opportunities, expectations, and challenges which characterize parenting in poverty. The current study, thus, attempts to bridge between foci on individual mothers' experiences of social support and the broader social capital context which promotes or inhibits the functionality of social networks to provide meaningful resources to enhance parenting. Before describing the study and its findings, I provide an overview of some specific research findings from the empirical literature dealing with social capital in

the context of family, parenting, and maternal and child poverty which have been formative in shaping the questions, measures, and analytic strategy of the current project.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Social Capital and the Development of Human Capital within Families

Building on Bourdieu's ideas, Coleman (1988) examined the role of parental and family social capital in facilitating the transfer of human capital from parents to children. Looking primarily at the social capital inherent in parent/child and parent/school-community relationships, Coleman argued that social networks in which adults play multiple and overlapping roles are particularly effective in promoting youth development. For example, when children's parents relate to their teachers not only in the school context, but also in social, church, and community settings, this represents "network closure," through which information, monitoring, norms, and expectations are consistently expressed to children across interconnected domains and settings of their lives. Coleman theorized that network closure within Catholic school communities generates high levels of social capital, indicated by mutual obligations, trust, shared expectations and norms, and effective sanctions. He then linked higher social capital to greater school success by demonstrating the lower drop-out rates for Catholic school versus public school youth.

Using similar indicators of social capital, Teachman et al. (1998) demonstrated that social capital mediates the effects of parental financial and human capital on high school drop-out rates. Also along these lines, Furstenburg and Hughes (1995) reveal a positive relationship between social capital and successful development into adulthood for children of teenage parents. Carbonaro (1999), however, suggests that the value of social capital generated from closed networks depends on the actual composition of the networks (who is in them, and what those people have to offer), and their use-value (if and how they are actually mobilized). Overall, this trajectory of research provides a basis for this study's

premise that social capital is important for parenting and youth development, and that the value of social capital for parenting depends, at least in part, on the functionality of social networks to provide social support.

Social Capital and Low-Income Youth

The research on social capital and poor families has focused primarily on older children and adolescents (Brooks-Gunn et al., 1993, Briggs, 1998; Kelly, 1994; Stanton-Salazar, 1997), and has highlighted the importance of "leveraging" relationships, or social ties to more advantaged others, for promoting youth development. For example, Briggs (1998) demonstrates that poor minority adolescents who establish a relationship with just one employed or white adult have significantly higher perceived access to leverage that might enhance work or educational opportunities. Kelly (1994) showed that the presence of network members with different social statuses (i.e., the presence of advantaged others) affects the use-value of social capital for poor children. Furstenburg et al. (1999) found that social capital is an important predictor of low-income youth's academic success, and that successful low-income parents employ family management strategies that include guiding and leveraging their children's participation in broader social environments of school and community. Stanton-Salazar (1997) explored the relationship between the social capital accruing from working-class minority children's supportive relationships with institutional agents at school (teachers, counselors) and those children's acquisition of the cultural "decoding" skills necessary for school success when family and school cultures, languages, and behavioral expectations are dramatically different. In general, these studies provide support for a social capital perspective on social inequalities, indicating that deficits in social leverage constrict opportunities for mobility through educational or employment success. Perhaps most important for the current study, however, these studies suggest that while the presence of advantaged social ties is a necessary condition of social capital development, it is not a sufficient condition in the absence of the social and linguistic skills which make social networks functional.

Social Capital, Parenting, and Young Children

Research focusing on older children indicates that effective parents build social capital with and for their children through the schools and local institutions which are the primary context for youth development. For younger children, however, parents themselves play a broader role not only in accessing resources but in mediating the day-to-day social, home, and neighborhood contexts of their children's lives. Guo and Harris (2000), for example, found that parenting practices, in particular the provision of cognitive stimulation in the home, fully mediate the effects of parental income poverty on child developmental outcomes. Along these lines, Klebanov et al. (1997) examined the role of family processes in the relationships between neighborhood context and developmental outcomes for preschool-aged children, finding significant relationships between neighborhood factors and child development which were partially mediated by family processes—particularly, quality of the home learning environment.

The Klebanov study was grounded in a discussion of Wilson's (1996) hypotheses regarding parenting norms, patterns and expectations for family life, and the opportunity structures in neighborhoods with high rates of poverty and joblessness. A measure used for maternal social support, which could be a key indicator of mothers' functional access to socially embedded resources, combined mothers' access to a wide range of socially embedded resources, from help for making important decisions and having someone with whom to enjoy a free afternoon, to having someone who will loan money in an emergency. Social support was found to be significantly related to neighborhood factors but had few significant effects on child outcomes, net of other maternal, family, and neighborhood attributes. Relationships between social support and parenting practices, which is a primary concern of the current study, were not specifically examined. Moreover, the combining of different types of social supports (emotional and instrumental) leaves open the question of how functional access to different types of resources relates to parenting practices and ultimately to child outcomes.

The current study will, therefore, revisit this issue of social support, considering the possibility that social support is a marker of social position more generally, and may be an important mechanism through which mothers encounter and access social capital in support of their parenting. Along these lines, this study will address three questions:

- Are there meaningful differences in poor mothers' access to functional social supports?
- How does functional social support relate to "social position", as indicated by structural domains of social capital, in concert with human and economic capital?
- Does functional social support moderate the relationships between mothers' resources and social capital with respect to parenting practices?

METHODS

Sample

The data for this study are from the Child Outcomes Study (COS), a special component of the National Evaluation of Welfare to Work Strategies (NEWWS) evaluation of 11 welfare-to-work programs operated under the JOBS program in the mid-1990s, prior to the 1996 passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA). Recruitment to NEWWS took place during orientation to the JOBS program, and all NEWWS participants were randomly assigned to a control group, a "labor force attachment" group, or a "human capital development" group. Intervention participation, however, is not a focus of the analysis presented in this paper, and is controlled for in all analyses. Baseline demographic and attitudinal data were collected at the time of orientation, and administrative data on participation and income were collected over the course of the survey. The COS sample (n = 3,018) was drawn from the NEWWS population of women with a child between 3 and 5 years old at the time of random assignment, and was conducted 2 years postassignment in three NEWWS sites: Atlanta, Georgia; Riverside, California; and Grand Rapids, Michigan. All COS respondents were

also included in a 2-year Public Opinion survey. Data for this study are taken from the baseline data and the 2-year COS and Public Opinion surveys.

Measures

Maternal Attributes

The respondent's marital status is measured as never-married (0) versus married, widowed or divorced (1). Age is measured in years rounded to 25, 35, or 45. Race is measured with dummy variables for Black (1) and Hispanic (1), with White as the omitted category. A measure for teen parent status contrasts respondents who were 19 or younger at the time of first childbearing (1) to those who were older than 19 (0). Respondents whose families did receive AFDC while they were children (1) were contrasted with those having no childhood AFDC history (0).

Finally, considering the previously discussed literature indicating that social support is an important buffer against stress, a measure of the respondent's stress regarding parenting responsibilities was included (five-item scale from PSI [Abidin, 1986], alpha = .65, ranging from 1 to 10, with higher numbers reflecting higher levels of stress).

Human Capital

Education is measured by contrasting respondents who had completed high school or a GED at baseline (1) with those who had not (0). In addition, respondents who had a baseline test score ranked as "low" in literacy (1) and math (1) were contrasted with those who did not have a low test score in each area (0). Subjects' total years of receiving welfare (0 = more than 10 years, 1 = more than 5 through 10 years, 2 = more than 2 through 5 years, 3 = 2 years or less), and work experience (1 = has held a full time job for 6 or more months with a single employer), as measured at baseline, were also included.

Economic Capital

Two measures of economic capital were used: first, from administrative records, subject's total income (in dollars) averaged across the 2 years following random assignment; and second, based on

research suggesting that earned income has a different effect on family and child outcomes than does income from other sources (Mayer, 1997), a measure of percentage of subjects' income from earnings in the second year after random assignment.

Social Capital

Social capital was measured at both the family-structural and the neighborhood levels. Drawing on Coleman's (1988) ideas about **family structure** as a producer of social capital for children, this study includes family-structural measures of (1) the number of children in the household, (2) income from other household members (respondent self-report based on last month prior to 2-year follow-up interview), and (3) the number of wage-earning adults (not including the subject) living in the household. **Neighborhood factors** were (1) an interviewer assessment of the overall quality of physical structures in the neighborhood immediately surrounding the respondent's residence[1] and (2) respondents' reports of perceived level of neighborhood danger to their child.[2] Finally, subjects were asked what proportion of their close friends are welfare recipients (1 = "none", through 5 = "most" close friends on welfare)—intended as a rough proxy for the pervasiveness of welfare participation as a norm within mothers' peer group (Wilson, 1996; Klebanov et al., 1997). Proportion of friends on welfare was measured at baseline, but other measures were available only at the 2-year follow-up.

Functional Social Support

This study used six indicators (see Table 1) of mothers' functional access to socially embedded resources—hereafter to be referred to as functional support. Mothers rated each indicator on a scale from 0 to 10, with 0 = "not at all true" and 10 = "completely true" (alpha for the six items of the scale used in this study is .76). The first three indicators tap more emotional domains of support, which based on social

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[1]Categorized (to accommodate missingness on this measure) and entered in regressions as a series of dummy variables with low quality (1), moderate quality (1), and missing (1) neighborhood environment, with high-quality neighborhood environment as the omitted category.

[2]Respondents indicated how "true" was the statement: "Thinking about your child, how true is it that?: I feel I must keep my child inside our home as much as possible because of dangers in the neighborhood" (reverse coded to 0 = completely true, through 10 = not true)

TABLE 1
Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Mean/Proportion	Standard Deviation
Maternal attributes		
White	0.24	0.42
Black	0.64	0.48
Hispanic	0.08	0.27
Age	29.18	5.84
Teen childbearing	0.48	0.50
Ever married	0.38	0.49
Stress (0 to 10)	4.20	2.14
Childhood AFDC	0.29	0.45
Human capital		
High school diploma/GED	0.59	0.49
Low literacy	0.35	0.48
Work experience	0.67	0.47
Years of AFDC*	1.80	0.97
Economic capital		
Income	8828.03	4036.81
% income from earnings	28.09	33.63
Low neighborhood quality	0.10	0.30
Social capital		
Med neighborhood quality	0.50	0.50
Danger (0 to 10)	4.85	3.47
Public/subsidized housing	0.40	0.49
Welfare friends*	1.20	1.14
Income from other household earners (in $)	455.34	786.07
# of children	2.26	1.14
# other household earners	0.33	0.61
Parenting practices (range from 0 to 10)		
Discipline	5.38	2.39
Learning environment	4.34	0.90
Warmth	6.99	1.71
Valid N (listwise)	**2032.00**	

(table continues)

TABLE 1, continued

Variable	Mean/Proportion	Standard Deviation
Functional support indicators (range from 0 to 10)		
Talk (n = 2,011)	7.61	3.18
Trust (n = 2,032)	6.67	3.55
Friend (n = 2,031)	7.08	3.15
Watch (n = 2,021)	6.13	3.70
Cash (n = 2,024)	5.93	3.70
Ride (n = 2,025)	7.16	3.42

Notes: Mean scores for categorical variables represent percentage of sample ascribing to the category. Means on functional support indicators are reported using all available cases for each indicator rather than listwise, since class membership was determined allowing for missing data—for all subsequent analyses, N=2032. For years of AFDC, 0=more than 10 years, 1=5 to 10 yrs, 2=2 to 5 yrs, 3 = less than 2 yrs. For "welfare friends," 1= "none" of close friends on welfare, 2= "few," 3= "some," 4= "many," and 5= "most."

Functional social support indicators

Emotional support indicators:

1. "When I have troubles or need help, I have someone I can really talk to." (TALK)
2. "If my child were playing outside and got hurt or scared, there are adults nearby who I trust to help my child". (TRUST)
3. "When my child is sick, friends or family will call or come by to check on how things are going." (FRIEND)

Instrumental support indicators:

4. "If I need to do an errand, I can easily find a friend or relative living nearby to watch my child." (WATCH)
5. "If I need to buy a pair of shoes for my child but I am short of cash, there is someone who would lend me the money." (CASH)
6. "If I need a ride to get my child to the doctor, there are friends I could call to help me." (RIDE)

capital theory, as discussed earlier, are expected to be rather universally available and less related to an individual's social location. The other three indicators tap more concrete resources, or instrumental domains of support, which are expected to be more scarce within the disadvantaged welfare population, and thus more tightly linked to variation in social location.

Parenting Practices

Research on parenting practices suggests that parents use different packages of strategies for responding to children in different environments, at different developmental stages, and with different goals in mind (Furstenberg et al., 1999; Guo and Harris, 2000). To try to capture the range of practices through which parents' guide their children's development, three domains of parenting practices were identified in the COS 2-year follow up data.

The first measure, **learning environment**, includes indicators of quality of home environment, parents' provision of cognitively stimulating activities, and degree of involvement in school- and community-based opportunities for child learning. It is a 12-item scale, and subjects missing no more than three items were included. Alpha for the scale is .67, with indicators from HOME-SF (Baker and Mott, 1989) and Moore et al.'s descriptive study (1995).

The second measure, **discipline**, refers to parents' attitudes toward controlling discipline. It is a three-item scale, with alpha of .51.[3] Indicators measure parents' agreement with statements: "I teach my child to keep control of his or her feelings at all times" (PACR—Easterbrooks and Goldberg, 1984); "It is sometimes necessary to discipline a child with a good, hard spanking" (descriptive study, Moore et al., 1995); and "If a mother never spanks her child, the child won't learn respect" (descriptive study, Moore et al., 1995). This index provides information on parents' attitudes toward controlling disciplinary practices, but it does not provide information on their attitudes toward alternative strategies, or on the degree to

[3]Because this alpha is low, the analysis was also conducted with each item separately, and because results were in the same direction without significant differences in coefficients in the regressions, the index is used in the analysis reported here, though it is recognized that this raises issues for interpretation of results, some of which are addressed in the discussion section.

which they are proactive in providing discipline through any strategy whatsoever. Thus, low scores on controlling discipline do not suggest a preference for desirable disciplinary practices, but only a resistance to those labeled here as "controlling."

The third measure, of **maternal warmth**, is a three-item, interview-assessed scale with items measuring mother's degree of warmth toward child (0 = "extremely hostile" through 10 = "extremely warm, loving, affectionate to child"), pride and pleasure in the child (0 = "showed no pride or pleasure in child" through 10 = "took great deal of pride or pleasure in child"), and degree of verbal complexity in speaking with the child (0 = "communicated in single words or gestures" through 10 = "spoke to child in complete, complex sentences") each during the in-home interview. Alpha for the scale is .77.

All three scales have been coded such that higher scores indicate more positive parenting—more opportunities for learning, less use of controlling discipline, and expressions of greater warmth. It should be noted that these parenting measures reflect largely middle-class, white standards of desirable parenting. Research suggests that the effectiveness of parenting strategies in influencing child well-being depends on neighborhood and cultural context, as well as on the child's own innate characteristics (McLoyd, 1990; Furstenberg et al., 1999). Further discussion will be left for later sections of this paper, but it is important to emphasize that while this study assigns a "positive" direction to parenting practice scales, this is fundamentally a reference to the positive association between the parenting practice and current, mainstream standards of good parenting. Descriptive statistics for the all measures are presented in Table 1.

Analytic Strategy

The overall goal of this analysis was to identify patterns in subjects' access to functional support, and to describe and understand those patterns in relation to parents' individual attributes, to more structural "social capital" resources inherent in family- and neighborhood-level social systems, and ultimately to parenting practices. The logic of this analysis is largely inductive—beginning with an

exploration of the data for meaningful categories with respect to social support, and then working up from those categories to organize information about women's resources, attributes, and neighborhoods in ways that suggest possible patterns in their experiences of parenting. Thus, this project is descriptive rather than causal in its intent.

The first step to breaking out distinct patterns of social support involved identifying functional support subgroups within the NEWWS/COS population. Latent profile analysis, a person-centered approach to exploring potential heterogeneity (Muthen and Muthen, 2000), was used to identify latent "classes" in the sample based on subjects' patterns of scores on the six indicators of functional support, and beginning with an a priori hypothesis that "emotional support" and "instrumental support" are distinct domains of social support and are linked to a structural perspective on what social support is.

The second step of the analytic process addressed the relationships between functional support and more structural domains typically associated with social capital, as well as the relationships between functional support and economic and human capital. This step involved describing how the functional support classes were different—in terms of the relationships between parents' own attributes, their family and neighborhood systems, and their parenting practices. Following the assignment of individuals into latent classes, chi-square and MANCOVA were used to compare classes on individual, family, and neighborhood attributes, as well as on parenting practices.[4]

In the final step, a series of regression models explored how functional support class membership may moderate the relationships among maternal resources and parenting practices. In particular, it was expected, based on existing research, that maternal stress as well as structural domains of social capital would be moderated by functional support class. In other words, it was expected that just knowing someone would help for "getting by" with daily stresses, while the social location of those you know would be more important for "getting ahead"—to perhaps more mainstream ways of parenting. First, a

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[4]It has been suggested that multinomial logistic regression would be appropriate for comparing these classes, and this strategy is being considered for a future revision of this paper.

full-sample regression was run giving an initial estimate of the effects of maternal characteristics, human capital, economic capital, and social capital on parenting practices. Next, parallel regressions were run for each functional support class, thus describing within-class relationships and allowing for the comparison of coefficients on stress and social capital between classes. Finally, based on significant differences in the variables of interest as indicated by the parallel regressions, two full-sample regression models were estimated modeling between-class differences in terms of interactions (shown in Table 3).[5]

RESULTS

Functional Support Classes

The latent profile analysis indicated that the COS sample can usefully be understood as composed of three distinct subgroups, or classes, with respect to functional support, and supported the hypothesis that classes in respect to functional support would reflect a distinction between "emotional support" and "instrumental support." Model testing began with estimation of an unrestricted model with the null hypothesis of all observations belonging to the same class, and proceeded iteratively. Mplus provides statistics for examining model fit, including the Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC), a measure of entropy, and the log likelihood. Models with lower BIC values, higher entropy values (on a scale from 0 to 1), and larger log likelihoods reflect the best fit to the data. In addition to iteratively evaluating changes in these measures of model fit, however, consideration must be made for the interpretability of the results, the meaningfulness of classes, and the average probabilities of class assignment (Muthen and Muthen, 2000).

A three-class model fits the data best. Beginning with a one-class model, the process of increasing the number of classes yielded reductions in the BIC up through a six-class model,

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[5]A fully interacted model would be the equivalent of the earlier testing of differences between coefficients in the parallel models, but is not included here for sake of simplicity, and because it does not change the interpretation of the variables of interest.

corresponding to increases in log likelihood at each iteration. Entropy, however, increased to .935 (from .917) in a three-class model, then dropped down to .917 in a four-class model, re-attaining the .935 level only in the six-class model. In addition, the class probabilities began to decrease to undesirable levels (at or below .9) in some classes starting with the four-class model. Finally, results became less interpretable beyond a three-class model, with some classes differing on only one indicator, and other classes with similar patterns between indicators and only slight changes in levels. For these reasons, a three-class model was adopted, and the three functional support classes reflect low, moderate, and high levels of support, with the largest differences between classes occurring in the levels on indicators of instrumental, rather than emotional, support (see Figure 1).

Differences between Classes

Do these three latent classes of support align with traditional social capital indicators, or with other markers of social location? Considering differences between the three class in terms of individual, family, and neighborhood characteristics, chi-square and MANCOVA analyses indicated that, overall, low functional support class members were quite broadly disadvantaged compared to the other groups, while moderate support class members appeared to be primarily disadvantaged in terms of *neighborhood*. Table 2 summarizes these results.

In terms of education, literacy, ethnicity, marital status, AFDC history, and percentage of income from earnings, moderate support class mothers do not differ from high support class mothers. Moderate support class mothers, however, had the highest levels of stress among the groups, and reported the highest levels of perceived neighborhood danger. Low support class mothers, on the other hand, had lower levels of human capital--more problems with literacy and high school noncompletion. Low support mothers were also less likely to be never-married, had on average more children, and were disproportionately black.

FIGURE 1
Types and Levels of Social Support by Functional Support Class

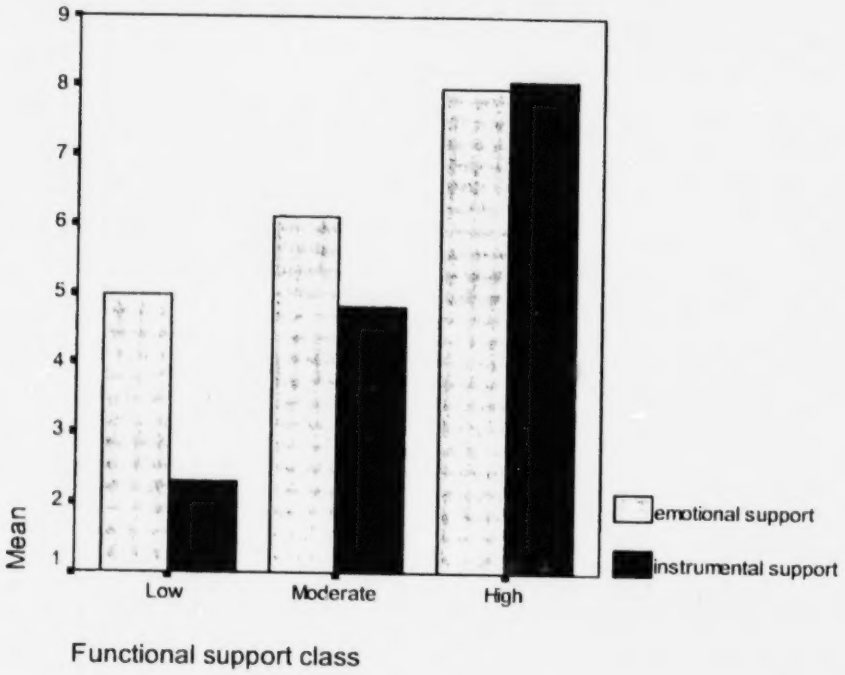

TABLE 2
Low, Moderate and High Functional Support Class Differences
Functional Support Class

Variable	Low Support Mean	Low Support SD		Moderate Support Mean	Moderate Support SD		High Support Mean	High Support SD	
White	0.18	*0.38*	***	0.25	*0.43*		0.25	*0.43*	
Black	0.69	*0.46*	***	0.63	*0.48*		0.63	*0.48*	
Hispanic	0.07	*0.25*		0.08	*0.27*		0.08	*0.27*	
Age	29.38	*5.84*		29.40	*6.07*		29.06	*5.76*	
Teen childbearing	0.51	*0.50*		0.50	*0.50*		0.47	*0.50*	
Ever married	0.42	*0.49*	*	0.40	*0.49*		0.36	*0.48*	*
Stress	4.22	*2.21*		4.54	*2.07*	c***	4.09	*2.13*	c***
Childhood AFDC	0.28	*0.45*		0.33	*0.47*	*	0.27	*0.45*	
HS diploma/GED	0.53	*0.50*	**	0.58	*0.49*		0.61	*0.49*	**
Low literacy	0.41	*0.49*	**	0.34	*0.47*		0.33	*0.47*	*
Work experience	0.64	*0.48*		0.66	*0.48*		0.68	*0.47*	
Years of AFDC	1.64	*1.00*	a**	1.74	*0.94*		1.87	*0.96*	a**
Income (in dollars)	8850.05	*3646.01*		8888.55	*3844.45*		8801.70	*4205.46*	
% income from earnings	23.49	*31.25*	a**	26.60	*32.22*		29.90	*34.60*	a**
Low neighborhood quality	0.10	*0.30*		0.12	*0.32*		0.09	*0.29*	
Med neighborhood quality	0.54	*0.50*		0.50	*0.50*		0.49	*0.50*	
Danger	5.26	*3.56*	a**	5.29	*3.11*	c**	4.58	*3.54*	a** c**
Public/subsidized housing	0.46	*0.50*	**	0.45	*0.50*	*	0.36	*0.48*	***
Welfare friends	1.30	*1.21*		1.29	*1.14*		1.15	*1.11*	
Income from other hhold earners (in dollars)	315.29	*558.90*	a***	314.86	*570.97*	c***	542.19	*885.15*	a*** c***
# of children	2.47	*1.20*	a** b*	2.25	*1.09*	b*	2.20	*1.13*	a**
# other hhold earners	0.22	*0.49*	a***	0.24	*0.49*	c***	0.39	*0.67*	a***c***
Discipline	5.38	*2.41*		5.53	*2.17*		5.33	*2.45*	
Learning environment	4.23	*0.93*	a**	4.32	*0.91*		4.37	*0.88*	a**
Warmth	6.73	*1.72*	a**	6.98	*1.75*		7.07	*1.68*	a**
Valid N (listwise)	363			414			1255		

Note: For categorical variables, table indicates the percentage of mothers ascribing to each condition, with the cell-wise hypergeometric probability for evaluating statistical significance. For continuous variables, mean differences were evaluated, controlling for intervention group, ethnicity, and city, using the Sidak adjustment for multiple comparisons. (a) refers to differences between low and high classes, (b) to differences between low and moderate classes, and (c) to differences between moderate and high classes. *** = p<.001, ** = p<.01, * = p<.05.

TABLE 3
Maternal Resources, Social Capital, and Functional Support Class in Relation to Parenting

Independent Variables	Parenting Practice																	
	Discipline								Learning Environment				Warmth					
	Model 1				Model 2				Model 1				Model 1				Model 2			
	B	SE	Beta		B	SE	Beta		B	SE	Beta		B	SE	Beta		B	SE	Beta	
(Constant)	7.12	0.45		***	7.64	0.49		***	4.67	0.17		***	7.32	0.35		***	7.02	0.36		***
Black	-1.12	0.17	-0.22	***	-1.13	0.17	-0.23	***	0.43	0.06	0.23	***	0.18	0.13	0.05		0.19	0.13	0.05	
Hispanic	-0.23	0.23	-0.03		-0.26	0.23	-0.03		0.27	0.09	0.08	**	-0.15	0.18	-0.02		-0.15	0.18	-0.02	
Age	0.01	0.01	0.03		0.01	0.01	0.03		0.00	0.00	-0.03		0.01	0.01	0.02		0.01	0.01	0.03	
Teen childbearing	-0.08	0.11	-0.02		-0.09	0.11	-0.02		-0.03	0.04	-0.02		-0.06	0.08	-0.02		-0.05	0.08	-0.01	
Ever married	-0.20	0.11	-0.04		-0.20	0.11	-0.04		0.00	0.04	0.00		0.03	0.08	0.01		0.02	0.08	0.01	
Stress	-0.31	0.02	-0.28	***	-0.44	0.05	-0.39	***	-0.03	0.01	-0.07	**	-0.05	0.02	-0.06	**	-0.04	0.02	-0.06	*
Childhood AFDC	0.02	0.11	0.00		0.00	0.11	0.00		-0.02	0.04	-0.01		-0.19	0.09	-0.05	*	-0.18	0.09	-0.05	*
HS diploma/GED	-0.09	0.11	-0.02		-0.09	0.11	-0.02		0.08	0.04	0.05	*	0.17	0.08	0.05	*	0.17	0.08	0.05	*
Low literacy	-0.34	0.14	-0.07	*	-0.36	0.14	-0.07	**	0.05	0.05	0.02		-0.13	0.10	-0.04		-0.12	0.10	-0.03	
Work experience	0.24	0.11	0.05	*	0.25	0.11	0.05	*	0.11	0.04	0.06	**	0.11	0.08	0.03		0.11	0.08	0.03	
Years of AFDC	0.11	0.06	0.05		0.11	0.06	0.04		-0.01	0.02	-0.01		-0.06	0.04	-0.03		-0.06	0.04	-0.03	
Income	0.00	0.00	-0.02		0.00	0.00	-0.02		0.00	0.00	0.00		0.00	0.00	0.03		0.00	0.00	0.03	
% income from earnings	0.00	0.00	0.01		0.00	0.00	0.02		0.00	0.00	0.06	*	0.00	0.00	0.02		0.00	0.00	0.02	
Low neigh quality	-0.09	0.18	-0.01		-0.12	0.18	-0.02		-0.77	0.07	-0.26	***	-0.82	0.13	-0.14	***	-0.82	0.13	-0.14	***
Med neigh quality	-0.17	0.10	-0.04		-0.17	0.10	-0.03		-0.55	0.04	-0.31	***	-0.63	0.08	-0.18	***	-0.63	0.08	-0.19	***
Danger	-0.06	0.01	-0.09	***	-0.07	0.01	-0.09	***	0.00	0.01	-0.02		0.00	0.01	-0.01		0.00	0.01	-0.01	
Public/sub. housing	-0.01	0.12	0.00		0.00	0.12	0.00		0.00	0.04	0.00		0.08	0.09	0.02		0.08	0.09	0.02	
Welfare friends	-0.30	0.08	-0.08	***	-0.30	0.08	-0.08	***	-0.03	0.02	-0.04		-0.14	0.04	-0.09	***	0.07	0.07	0.05	
Income from hhold members	0.00	0.00	0.02		0.00	0.00	0.02		0.00	0.00	0.02		0.00	0.00	0.03		0.00	0.00	0.02	
# of children	0.03	0.05	0.01		0.03	0.05	0.02		-0.05	0.02	-0.06	**	-0.03	0.04	-0.02		-0.04	0.04	-0.02	
# hhold earners	-0.16	0.13	-0.04		-0.18	0.13	-0.05		-0.05	0.05	-0.03		-0.04	0.10	-0.02		-0.03	0.10	-0.01	
Moderate support class[a]	0.10	0.15	0.02		-0.24	0.35	-0.04		-0.12	0.06	-0.05	*	-0.25	0.12	-0.06	*	0.01	0.17	0.00	
High support class[a]	-0.34	0.13	-0.07	**	-1.07	0.27	-0.22	***	0.00	0.05	0.00		0.02	0.09	0.00		0.38	0.14	0.11	**
Moderate support class X stress[a]					0.08	0.07	0.07										-0.21	0.10	-0.09	*
High support class X stress[a]					0.17	0.06	0.19	**	0.191								-0.29	0.08	-0.17	***
Adj. R^2	0.22				0.23								0.11				0.11			

Notes: All regressions included a set of control variables, for intervention group, city, missing categories on ethnicity, AFDC history, and neighborhood quality, and an interaction of intervention group with low literacy which was needed to address a variation in the random assignment design in the Riverside location. Model 2 was not run for learning environment, since parallel regressions did not indicate significant moderating effects of class membership. *** = p<.001, ** = p<.01, * = p< .05.

[a] Low support class is the omitted reference group for the Discipline regressions.

[b] Moderate support class is the omitted reference group for the Warmth regressions.

Low and moderate support class mothers also demonstrated similarities. When compared to high support class mothers, they were more likely to live in public housing and in more dangerous neighborhoods, and to have fewer other wage-earning adults in their households, with their other household members also providing less income. In terms of their parenting practices, low support class mothers demonstrated significantly less warmth and provided less stimulating learning environments than did high support class mothers, while moderate support class mothers showed no significant differences on parenting compared to the other groups.

Packages of Resources to Support Parenting

Is social support related to parenting practices? Table 3 demonstrates the relationships among maternal characteristics, human capital, economic capital, social capital, and parenting practices, accounting for differences due to functional support class membership. Not surprisingly, higher levels of stress are associated with more controlling discipline, less stimulating learning environments, and less maternal warmth toward the child. Mothers with lower levels of human capital—those who lacked high school diplomas or who had low literacy—had lower scores on parenting, net of other variables. In addition, lower quality neighborhood environments were linked to less stimulating learning environments and to less warmth. Having higher proportions of friends on welfare was related to more controlling discipline and to less warmth, while a higher level of perceived danger was associated with more controlling discipline. Functional class membership was significantly related to parenting, net of other variables, with low support class mothers providing less stimulating learning environments than high support class mothers, and low support class mothers demonstrating less warmth than moderate support class mothers. Perhaps counterintuitively, high support class mothers had more controlling discipline than did low support class mothers, controlling for other variables.

A combination of support class and other maternal resources and attributes is related to differences in parenting. Looking at the interaction term in Model 2 of Table 3 for the discipline outcome

variable, belonging to the high support group (contrasted with the low support group) lessened the relationship between maternal stress and controlling parenting. In other words, mothers with high levels of functional social support appeared to be "buffered" from translating their own stress into controlling parenting, which is consistent with findings from other studies (Ceballo and McLoyd, 2002). Turning to the Table 3 regressions for warmth, significant interactions of low and high support class membership with proportion of friends on welfare indicates that moderately constrained functional support diminishes the negative effect of a welfare-based peer group on maternal warmth. In this case, some degree of distancing from a disadvantaged social network may be a therapeutic withdrawal from relationships which seem to have high costs for parenting.

DISCUSSION

Analyses were intended to interrogate the notion of "social support" as a discrete or unified domain. Results of this study suggest significant heterogeneity within the functional social support of mothers on welfare and suggest that nuances within social support may mark other individual and contextual differences which, in concert, are important resources for parenting. Low functional support class membership was related to overall disadvantage, reflected in lower maternal human capital, and lower social capital at both family and neighborhood levels. Moderate functional support class membership, however, was related primarily to neighborhood disadvantage—suggesting both a mismatch between mothers' own attributes and their living conditions (which may be linked to the higher rates of stress and perceptions of danger), and a potentially unique set of strategies for drawing on available socially embedded resources, while distancing from social contexts and ties which are perceived as negative.

These findings suggest that functional support may be a manifestation of social position more generally, since mothers at the highest individual disadvantage report the least functional social support, and in particular low levels of instrumental versus emotional support. Bourdieu's theory of social capital

suggests an interrelatedness of types of capital, in which an individual's social position shapes opportunities for education, income, social ties, and cultural expressions, which are all mutually reinforcing and which work to sustain one's social position relative to the overall social hierarchy. This study's finding that categorizing mothers based on functional support also exposes differences in these various types of capital provides additional support for Bourdieu's representation of social position. However, social capital theory does not specify how individuals' *agency* shapes their *response* to different social positions. In this study, low and moderate support mothers managed to parent within similarly diminished neighborhood conditions—but, moderate support mothers, perhaps due to their higher human capital, eked out more resources (considering their higher mean scores on measures of social support) while avoiding more costs (considering the interaction between moderate support membership and proportion of friends on welfare). At the same time, moderate support mothers absorbed more of the negative aspects of their neighborhood conditions, as evidenced by their higher levels of stress and greater concerns regarding danger.

In several additional ways, the differences between groups fit well with a social capital perspective. Low support class mothers were, on average, more likely to be long-term welfare recipients than were high support class mothers, demonstrating a connection between more advantaged social positions and greater opportunities for mobility (Wilson, 1996). High support class mothers were also less likely than either low or moderate support class mothers to live in public housing, or in neighborhoods they perceive as dangerous. This fits well with other analyses (Belle, 1983; Coulton, 1996) which indicate that unsafe neighborhoods and those with high proportions of low-income households may inhibit the formation of trusting social ties, since although relationships may provide critical mutual aid and pooling of resources, they are likely to involve high costs—in terms of expectations of reciprocity, as well as exposure to counter-mainstream norms, illegal activities, or even violence.

The gaps between low, moderate, and high support class mothers' welfare use and neighborhood conditions may be related to the high support class's greater family-based social capital—these mothers

were more likely to have other wage earners in the household, and those wage earners earned more money. For mothers with valuable resources embedded in family and household relationships, welfare may be more of a temporary strategy at a time of crisis than a long-term strategy for making ends meet, and there may be alternatives to living in public housing or unsafe neighborhoods (such as moving in with parents, sharing housing costs with partners or relatives), even when one's own financial resources are limited.

Considering these differences in concert, high support mothers appear to live in more resource-laden environments, to have access to more advantaged family and household members, and to draw on their own resources to support parenting practices. In this context, the relationship between high support class membership and more controlling parenting bears consideration. This study paints a picture of how social networks relate to other maternal and neighborhood resources for parenting among women on welfare, and in general, it appears that "good" things come together—more education, more earnings, better neighborhoods, more social support, and better parenting.

Why does social support have a negative relationship to discipline, net of other variables? There is an assumption, mentioned earlier, that parenting practices advocated within mainstream (i.e., white and middle-class) culture are, in fact, "positive." Discipline, however, can be considered to reflect norms and expectations which are functional within specific social situations, such that appropriate discipline in a dangerous urban neighborhood may be quite different from appropriate discipline in a bucolic suburban setting. At any given point in time it is unclear how much parenting practices reflect immediate circumstances rather than learned behaviors which are socially reinforced. Moreover, attitudes toward discipline may be contingent upon the meanings mothers attribute to different parenting decisions *within* a particular environmental context. That is, spanking may mean different things depending on when and why it is practiced. Such an understanding is supported within this study both by the seemingly contradictory findings regarding social support, stress, and discipline, and perhaps also by the low alpha on the discipline index. Social support "buffers" the effect of stress on controlling discipline, suggesting

perhaps a reduction in reactive parenting. But, social support reinforces the use of the "controlling" disciplinary practices outside their relation to stress, perhaps encouraging culturally normative and thoughtful approaches to child rearing which simply depart from current mainstream rhetoric of "good parenting." In this case, the low internal consistency on the index could be, in part, an expression of different meanings attached to the different wordings of questions, or to mothers' lack of clarity on how to express complex practices and preferences within constrained questions. In any event, a more complex measure of discipline which accounts for a wider range of practices, and allows mothers to identify nuances in their parenting strategies, would support future research.

In addition to examining the functionality of social networks and suggesting different understandings of parenting, the categorization of mothers into functional support classes points to questions about agency: how, when, and if parents develop and rely on social ties for different parenting purposes. Such questions are supported by the findings with respect to the interaction of moderate support membership with proportion of friends on welfare—it appears that *not* accessing social support from disadvantaged social ties may enhance parenting, particularly within resource-depleted neighborhood and social settings. Is this a choice mothers make depending on their understanding of the value of available social ties, a reaction to fear or stress, or some combination of these and other processes?

Finally, and along these lines, these analyses highlight the need for future research to better unpack the social constructions of "good parenting" and "welfare participation" more broadly. While "welfare participation" is generally considered as an attribute of individuals, "welfare" as a social structure is enormously powerful in shaping its subjects, in this case generating a group of study respondents which is disproportionately nonwhite, female, single-parent, and disenfranchised from the labor market. This shaping of "welfare participants" as a meaningful target for study works to entwine culture and particular family formations with conditions of extreme economic and social marginality. The consequences of this entwining for parenting, child development, and the reproduction of inequality are

not adequately represented through measures which associate "good parenting" with those practices most common, accepted, and functional within the dominant culture.

LIMITATIONS

This study has the following limitations which should be considered in interpreting results. First, the "functional support" construct at the core of this study, which separates emotional from instrumental support, was intended to capture some of the variability in the value of individuals' social ties and networks by distinguishing types of socially embedded resources. Social capital theory, however, suggests that a full understanding of the effect of social capital on social inequalities must consider the differences between social ties which help an individual to "get by" within a social position, and those ties to more advantaged others which can help an individual to "get ahead" to a more advantaged position. This distinction reflects structural as well as functional differences in social networks. Neighborhood measures, including the proportion of the subject's friends who are on welfare, give some insight into opportunities for network differentiation, but without any measure of proportion of friends who are in *advantaged* positions, or specific information about which social ties provide what types of resources (material, emotional, information, parenting advice or modeling, etc.), it is not possible to fully describe the interplay of social support and social capital with respect to parenting.

Next, because the COS sample was drawn from three cities, reflects a random assignment to intervention conditions, and is limited to the welfare population, findings are not highly generalizeable. Future research should explore these patterns and relationships with more geographically representative data, and with more socioeconomically diverse samples. It seems likely, from a conceptual perspective and with reference to previous research (Ceballo and McLoyd, 2002; Hashima and Amato, 1994) that the value of social support, which has been shown to be highly variable within the welfare population of this study, may be quite different among families with vastly different personal and economic assets.

Finally, the NEWWS is enormously rich as a quantitative data set and has allowed a preliminary exploration of the dynamics between social support, maternal resources, and parenting, with findings that are suggestive about strategies and dynamics within women's daily lives. The questions raised about how and why mothers do or do not use various social ties toward different ends will require complementary qualitative data to be more fully explored. Thus, while describing patterns and systems of relationships has been an important exploratory step, future work which highlights processes of change, and expands on this study's findings of complexity within constructs (in this case, "social support"), could better inform policy and practice.

CONCLUSIONS

This study has identified groups of mothers based on their access to social support, and then described those groups along other domains of life in poverty. By decomposing a traditional social support measure into a more nuanced analysis of how packages of social supports relate to social/structural position, this study has tried to present a more ecological perspective on managing to parent which highlights the importance of the specific, day-to-day relationships through which a mother encounters, experiences, mediates, and interprets the social structures which shape her parenting practices. Lending further support to findings from research which shows that neighborhood environment plays a pivotal role in shaping parenting and child outcomes, this study further indicates that mothers' engagement of social others in that environment is an important marker of the availability and value of resources and opportunities which support parenting. Developing a conceptual model of these relationships will require further empirical investigation, examining effects of social/structural factors and social support on a wider range of family functioning and economic outcomes, extending analysis to different populations, and tapping into women's explicit understandings of their own agency in the use of social resources for the management of parenting tasks. This study, however, contributes some preliminary information, indicating significant interplay between social structure and the value and

functionality of social relationships. At the same time, this study suggests a possible understanding of parenting in poverty in which women are strategic, even within highly marginalized social positions, in the use of socially embedded resources for parenting.

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